



EDUCATION OTHERWISE

**Home Education:
Information for
members of the
public**

SUMMARY

Education Otherwise is the charitable organisation which has been supporting home educated families for nearly fifty years. Our information sheets are based on our knowledge and expertise, supported where appropriate by legal advice.

Key Messages

- 1) **Home education is not a safeguarding concern:** Home educated children are no more likely than other children to be at risk.
- 2) **School is not compulsory:** Education is compulsory, school is not.
- 3) **Home education is a legal choice:** Home education is of equal status in law to school education. It is the default position unless a parent chooses to register the child at a school.
- 4) **Home education does not have to follow set hours:** Parents may choose how and when they home educate their child, provided that the education is suitable to the child.
- 5) **Play is learning:** Learning comes from experience and a home educated child playing outside, or travelling is still learning.
- 6) **Home education is different but equal:** Home education is different to school education, not less acceptable.
- 7) **A home educated child is in education:** Home education is not truancy.
- 8) **Home educating parents come from all parts of society:** Home education is successfully undertaken by parents from all walks of life.
- 9) **Home education is not a criticism of parents who send a child to school:** Not everybody wants to, or is able to, home educate a child.

December 2025

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Introduction

Education Otherwise is the charitable organisation which has been supporting home education and home educating families for nearly fifty years.

It was previously the case that, for most parents, the choice to home educate was a lifestyle choice, one requiring significant commitment in terms of time and resources.

The decision to home educate can be made for a great many reasons, such as: protecting the child's mental health, or their physical health, wanting to travel widely,

wanting to spend more time together as a family, providing for a child's special interests, a child having special needs, being bullied, or simply a child being less well suited to a school environment. However, in recent years we have seen a clear increase in parents coming to home education, not because they want to, but because they feel that their children's needs are not being met in school.



Positive relationships with families benefit children

The choice of how to educate the child is that of the parent, provided that the education is suitable to the child's *'age, ability, aptitude and to any special educational needs (the child) may have'*¹. Parents can elect to discharge their duty to ensure that their child receives a suitable education, by registering their child into a school. Parents can and do decide to home educate their children at any, or all stages of the child's education.

Members of the public who meet home educating families may not understand the law, or how home education is practised. In fact, most members of the public obtain their understanding from the media, which can cause further confusion.

This information relates to England and Wales and is intended to help to inform members of the public about home education and how home education is practised.

¹ Education Act 1996 s7

Education is compulsory, school is not.

Education is compulsory for all children in England and Wales from whichever date is soonest of the 1st January, 1st April, or 1st September after the child attains 5 years of age. Education remains compulsory to the last day of June in the school year during which the child attains 16 years of age.

The duty to ensure that the child receives a suitable education is a duty upon the parent, regardless of how the child is educated and this derives from the Education Act 1996 s7:



**‘The parent of every child of compulsory school age shall cause him to receive efficient full-time education suitable—
(a) to his age, ability and aptitude, and
(b) to any special educational needs he may have, either by regular attendance at school or otherwise’.**

This means that home education is of equal status in law to school education and a parent may elect to home educate at any point during the child’s compulsory education years. In fact, home education is the default position, as a child does not become a registered school pupil until such point as a parent elects to register that child in a school.

Parents of home educated children do not need to ask permission to home educate their child, are not required to notify their local authority of their decision to home educate their child and are not required to register with their local authority at any point.

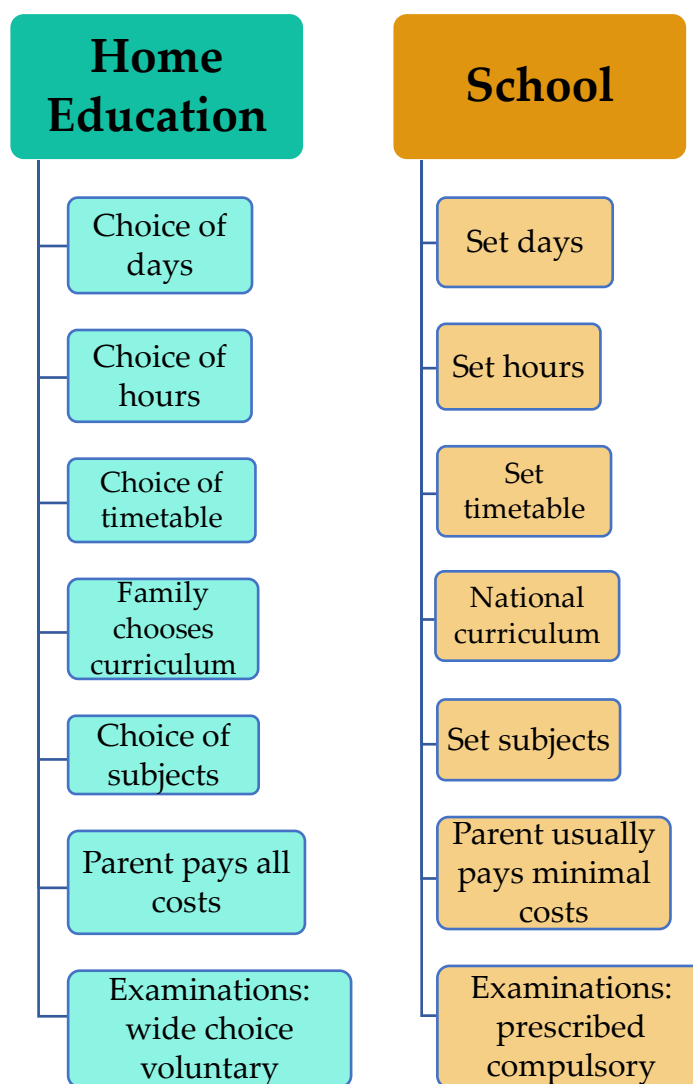
Home educated children are not pupils at a school and are not required to follow school hours, school terms, or any set curricula.

School versus home education

Many people assume that when a parent chooses to home educate their child it is a criticism of other parents' choice to send their child to school. This is rarely true and in fact, a great many home educating parents have another child at school or choose to send the child to school at some point. Home education represents a choice which parents make in order to provide their child with an education suited to them, as an individual.

Just as parents of school children will consider that school, or their child's particular school, is best for their child, so do home educating parents believe their choice to be best for their child. The choice is an individual one and should never be taken as criticism of other parents' choices. Home education and school education are simply different, but equally valid choices.

Some differences between school and home education



Of course, home educating parents can choose to provide education using any of the approaches used in school education, should they wish to do so

Out playing

One of the main areas of confusion over home education is that of where the child should be and when, but the answer is straightforward: Home educated children do not have to follow set hours, set days, or a set curriculum, they simply have to be suitably educated. A suitable education is defined as one which allows the child to take their part in their community but does not restrict them from living in another community, should they wish to do so.

A home educated child can be outside during school hours, on holiday during term time and anywhere that the public can go to. A home educated child is not truanting when out and about, but simply learning in a different way.

A home educated child is most usually educated, rather than taught

The difference between school education and home education can be difficult to understand, because our society has come to view school as the only way to provide an education. In fact, many parents still do not know that home education is a legal choice for parents to make.



Simply put, schools use a standardised, set curriculum in order to teach a set range of material to a large group of children. This is known as a curriculum centric education. Whereas home educating families educate the child in a manner which is individualised to that child. This is known as a child centric education.

Each child is different and some children will achieve their full potential and thrive at school, whereas others will do so through home education. The most important point is what is right for each child and each family.

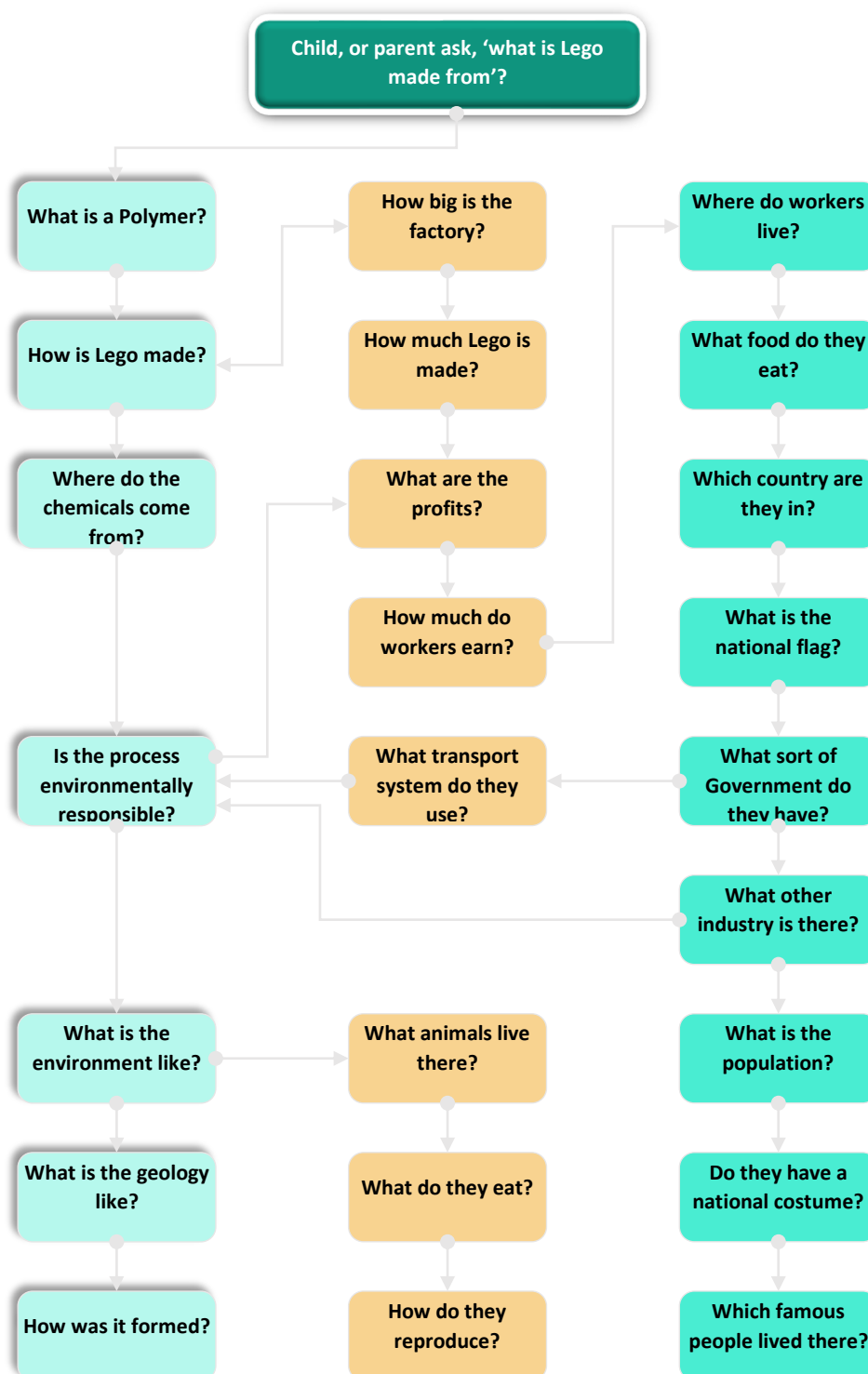
Home educated children can learn through a variety of methods, ranging from a structured provision, which is closer in appearance to school education, through to fully autonomous education in which the child is directly in control of their learning,

choosing subjects and methods which work best for them. Multidisciplinary approaches, often based on projects, solving problems, or meeting challenges are also widely used.

People can easily forget that playing is learning and 'lego learning' is an example of this.

Lego learning

Arrows indicate that the Child researches answer with support where appropriate.



The possibilities are endless and can include many subjects such as mathematics, English, geography, history, geology, music, social studies, art and science.

Home educated children are neither hidden, nor at risk. In fact, home educated children are uniquely visible

Child welfare

It is not uncommon for those who only know about home education through the media, to believe that home education is a risk for a child and that home educated children are 'hidden', abused and neglected. This misunderstanding is fuelled by the fact that the media presents stories in a way which sells and that often means that the stories are presented to promote a preconceived viewpoint, or at best misguided.

Academic research finds that home educated children are more likely than other children to be scrutinised by children's social services. This can often be due to misguided referrals from members of the public, or even medical professionals and teachers, who have limited knowledge of home education.

In fact, home educated children are less likely than children under 5 to be subject to a child protection plan, despite being scrutinised far more frequently than under 5 year olds are.

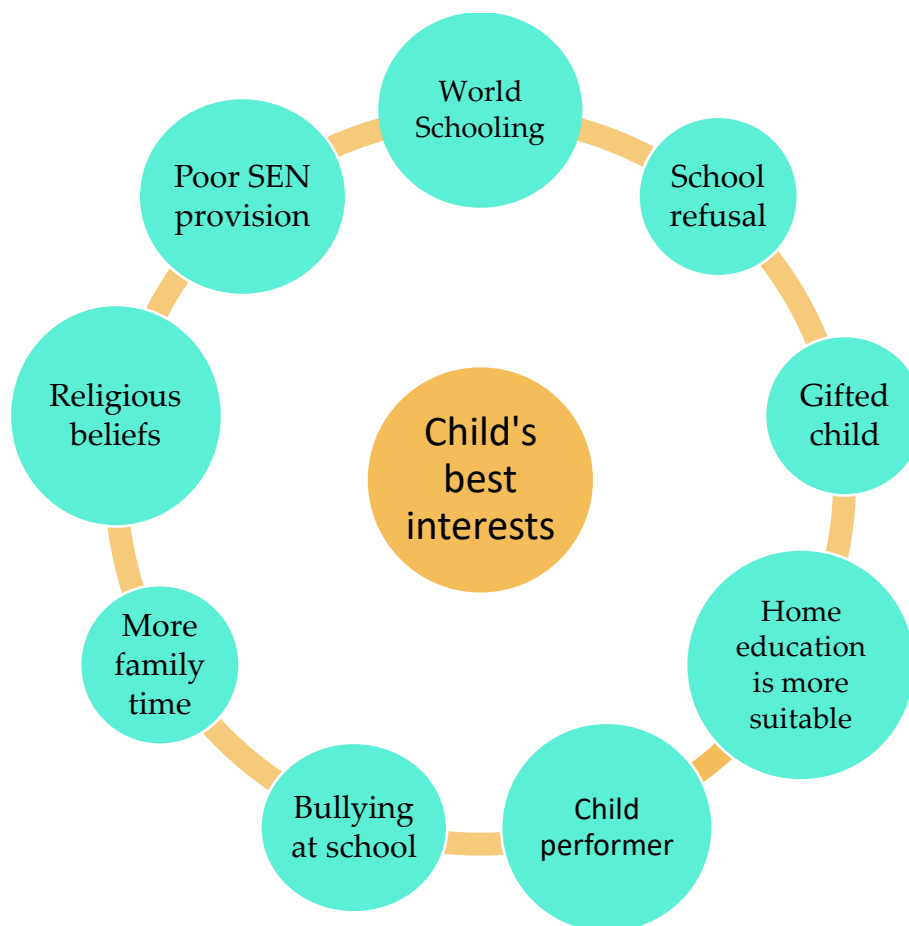
Home educated children are also no more likely to be subject to a child protection plan than are school children, despite being scrutinised far more frequently than school children are.

Unlike school children, who spend five days each term time week with the same group of children of their own age, home educated children socialise primarily within and outside, their own communities. This leads to them being uniquely visible, as they come to know many shopkeepers, librarians, neighbours, tradespeople, delivery personnel and others within those communities.

It is not unusual for a local community to take pride in 'their' home educated child and to ask the parents about the child's achievements on a regular basis. In fact, most members of the public are genuinely interested to learn about home education and to see home educated children learning in their different, but equally valid ways.

Reasons why parents home educate

Education Otherwise has been supporting home educating families for nearly five decades and it is our experience that those families almost always choose to home educate because it is in the best interests of their child. Parents choose to home educate for many reasons, some of which are illustrated below:



Sometimes parents have no choice but to home educate their child, such as when the child becomes anxious about school, to the point where they cannot attend, or when a school off rolls a child. What that means is that a school removes the child from the roll, or persuades the parent to do so. This can be because of head teacher's concerns that a child who is not achieving high grades will reflect badly on the school's overall performance or poor behaviour in school.

Regardless of the reason why parents choose to home educate their child, it is Education Otherwise' experience that most parents provide their child with a suitable education. In fact, research clearly demonstrates that home educated children achieve slightly higher academic outcomes on average, than do school children and this is probably because the education is tailored to their needs and delivered on a one to one basis.

Positive relationships

Home educating parents love to enthuse about their children's provision to people who show a genuine interest in it. They are also very open with support and advice to anyone who expresses an interest. In fact, during the period whilst school children were at home as a result of Covid 19, home educating parents supported school parents with information on resources, how to engage children in learning and general encouragement.

Building positive relationships between members of the public and home educating families, can often lead to much greater understanding, alleviate confusion and benefit everyone.



Understand: Asking about what is involved in home education in an open and non-judgemental way to learn from home educators, is an excellent route to understanding.

Accept: Accepting that people's choices can be different, without being less responsible, or suitable is a way for anyone to widen their thinking.

Involve: Inviting home educated children to join in local and community events and other social opportunities, can dispel the idea of 'them and us' and build bridges between families.

Share: Spreading the knowledge gained about home education can help to balance the effects of negative media portrayal and lead to greater community cohesion.

Every member of the public might at some point be the grandparent, aunt, uncle, partner, neighbour and hopefully a friend, of a home educating parent or child. Education Otherwise is here to help everyone to gain greater understanding and acceptance of how normal home education actually is!



The home education charity

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